

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Who seeks time? The Senator from North Carolina.

#### MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. FAIRCLOTH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there be a period for the transaction of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. FAIRCLOTH. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### VA-HUD APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, one of the pleasures and honors I have in this body is to serve as the chairman of the appropriations subcommittee that funds veterans' programs, housing, as well as environment, space, science, and emergency management.

On the veterans side, we have a very heavy responsibility to the people who, in my State and throughout the country, have been willing to put their lives on the line to protect our freedoms, and I think they deserve the best that we can give them. That is why in past years, I have been very disappointed and troubled at this administration's approach to funding for veterans' medical care. Quite frankly, they were willing to sacrifice these important programs, at least on paper, in order to pretend that they were reaching a balanced budget. I think that is just plain wrong.

I was also disappointed earlier this spring when the President and the congressional leadership proposed to take \$300 million out of veterans' medical care as a part of the budget agreement. I said at the time that we would not let that happen.

I am pleased to report that last night in a bipartisan, bicameral session, the Senate and House negotiators on both sides, Democrats and Republicans, approved a measure that provides more funding than the President, more funding than the budget agreement for veterans' medical care. The conference agreement that we hope will soon be signed into law provides \$17 billion next year for medical care for veterans. This level of funding ensures that we keep our promise of continued care to all eligible veterans.

We will also be able to continue our efforts to improve the VA medical system, which has been under great stress and which we hope is making progress toward more efficient, more effective, more humane care and treatment for our veterans who need care.

It is sometimes easy during peace and prosperity to forget temporarily the promises that we as a country have made to those veterans who were willing to risk their lives to protect us. I said throughout this budget process I did not intend to let us forget, and I hope we will move quickly to send this bill to the President.

In addition to the tough battles we fought in the veterans' medical care area and the difficult decisions we made, we had to make some tough decisions and take some difficult actions with respect to housing. Over the last several weeks, many elderly residents in public housing complexes in Missouri and I am sure in other States represented in this body, have expressed their deep concern about the possibility of their housing subsidies being ended.

HUD was required by law and did send notices to thousands of senior citizens across the country over the last few months telling them that their rent subsidies were scheduled to expire this fall. That is required by law. But for most of the seniors who received the notices, it is very frightening because it threatens to tell most of them they will no longer be able to afford their homes and will be forced to move.

I visited residences of complexes in St. Louis and Springfield, MO, and listened as the residents described their fears about losing their rent subsidies. I told them I would do everything in my power to help them stay in their homes.

I am pleased to announce once again that last night the House-Senate conference agreed to provisions that we crafted, that I crafted to protect elderly housing. During the years I have spent as a member of the Senate Banking Committee and now as chairman of the VA, HUD, and Independent Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee, I made preservation of affordable, low-income housing, especially for seniors, for the elderly, a top priority and a long-term commitment.

Unlike the administration which, for some reason, continues to emphasize the possibility of vouchers as a one-size-fits-all approach to housing needs of low-income families and the elderly, I believe that elderly housing complexes, which are good, safe places, comfortable for the elderly residents, should be maintained. Frankly, it is terrifying to seniors who may have lived 10 to 15 to 20 years in the same housing complex to tell them suddenly they must move: "Here is a voucher, go out and pound the pavement and try to find housing."

Mr. President, if you have visited these complexes, and I am sure you have them in your State as we have them in all of our States, all you have to do is go into one of those complexes and meet with the residents, many of them in walkers, using canes, in wheelchairs and think just a minute of giving those people vouchers and asking them to go out and look for housing.

What a ridiculous thought that is. We are not going to force them to go out and look for housing.

How many of us who have parents and grandparents or other relatives in elderly housing complexes want to see them torn away from their communities and forced to find new housing? I really believe that seniors should be treated differently from young persons eligible for subsidized housing.

While the trend in recent years has been to provide vouchers for recipients to use for housing of their choice in a variety of neighborhoods, many seniors—most of whom I talked to—prefer to remain in senior-only housing complexes. I think it makes sense for them to remain in communities where they have grown accustomed to living and have made friends and feel comfortable.

As chairman of the Senate appropriations subcommittee, I included language in the HUD-VA bill that was agreed to last night which does allow these seniors to remain in their homes, to remain in their complexes. Specifically, we provided for the renewal of project-based section 8 contracts at a rate affordable to the elderly.

Good, affordable elderly housing, more than just an example of a successful private-public partnership, is a community of people who live together and care about each other. We cannot afford to lose this type of housing. We cannot afford to lose the type of community this housing represents.

Washington sometimes loses sight of people and the importance of local communities. But I do not plan to let Washington lose sight of these elderly housing communities or the people who live in them now or in the future.

Mr. President, I thank the Chair. I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SANTORUM). The clerk will call the roll. The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, I will use my leader time to make a statement on a couple of issues.

#### TRIBUTE TO GEN. JOHN SHALIKASHVILI

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, I have very mixed feelings about the decision announced yesterday at the White House. After nearly four decades of exemplary service to his adopted Nation, Gen. John Shalikashvili will step down as the top soldier of our Nation's military forces. We understand that by statute he is required to do so, but it does not make the reality any less of a disappointment.

With his 39 years of distinguished service, General Shali, as he has come to be affectionately known, has earned